

Education Governance Responses
Bennington Meeting (3/27/07) - Mount Anthony Union Middle School

52 Attendees (facilitated by Robin Scheu)

Question #1: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the present education governance system in your community?:

Advantages

Have more community meetings
The feel of local control
Going your own way
Smaller class size
Time from home to school/travel bus time
Direct control over school boards of the local schools and easy access to board members, principals, and administration
Geographic proximity
Principals' relationship to both board and superintendent; team approach
Board gets to know individual schools
Local community has connection to the board vice-versa
Participation is more available
Learning communities may occur
Unique opportunities for parent/school relationships
Smallness keeps board members happy
Close ties to superintendent (2 board + su board)
K-12 curriculum
K-12 policies
Unified teacher contracts
Local control...knowing needs of school, vested interest, decision best for school
Consensus is easier
Decisions on local budget + resources
More direct control
Actual representation
Local understanding of needs
Small community > can be sympathetic to needs of parents/students
Don't have to advocate to multiple units/people
Class size
District-wide controls for sped ed, etc.
Multi-board system ensures members who know their one school very well
Common curriculum, policies, food service, contracts, purchasing + payroll
Still have opportunity individualized – policies, programs, initiatives
PTA/PTG
Strong “community” schools
Each school has unique personality
Boards – provide better representation of taxpayers
Curriculum
Resource sharing sped ed services
Advocacy – direct access to super

Disadvantages

Not everyone can attend board meetings
The loss of local control
Not keeping students at the same course level
Communication between SVSU
Lack of consolidation students/school
Resources Example - sports, etc.
Expense in transportation
No inter-connection between schools for students and teachers
Competition between nearby school districts
Financial disadvantage and redundancy
Competition for time and attention from the central office
No fear of losing Vermont cultural identity for the sake of corporate efficiency
Resources are not shared easily
Purchasing duplication of equipment and supplies
Boards are in competition rather than coop.
Are facilities equal for all children
One school may have more resources
Road blocks to learning communities
Equitable distribution of student population
Socio-economic divisions
Difficulty finding board members, superintendents
Too many boards/board members for 1 superintendent to be effective
BRSU-10 boards/7 towns/5 schools – OUCH!
Complex, inequitable representation @su + union level; not based on population
Education is more than it once was – more + tougher issues
Very small schools – hard to find/keep candidates for principals – they view it as a starter or
ender job
Difficulty establishing consolidated curriculum/policies
Inconsistent classification of 6th grade
Need for new ideas
Too many school boards
High taxes
Too many board meetings
Too many board members
Policies – process too long for ratification
Boards competing for same tax \$\$\$
Duplication of effort
Consolidation of resources
Superintendent responsible to too many boards
Balanced enrollment
Costly
System is not easy to understand
Creates conflict of interest i.e. principal
Inefficient
Boards too big/too cumbersome
Parents
More expensive than consolidation, so less \$ for other things
Some overcrowding in isolated elem. Schools vs. sharing to balance #'s

- ?consolidation – one specialist per county?
- >overstressed teacher and less personalization per student
- ? some members have more than board to serve on – does this pre-select or foster self-selection (time, etc) in a negative way
- Number of meetings
- Neglect of smaller schools
- Individual school strengths are not available to entire S.U. (theater, enrichment, ELF, string...)
- Bulk purchasing
- Too many layers of red tape
- Decision making multi boards – resolution is cumbersome
- Advocacy – 61 voices > 1 super
- Superintendent spread thin, meetings

Question #2: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the school district model suggested by Commissioner Cate in his White Paper?

Advantages

- One board – fewer meetings
- More communication between the communication with the principal and the community
- Resources are shared – more equitable
- Equalization of student population and per pupil expenditures
- Budget forming will be easier
- Reduce cost
- Smaller working group
- Less meetings for administration
- We can continue bulk purchasing, common contracts, common policies....
- Reduce the demand on the central office
- Easier personnel sharing and transition
- Opportunity for more consistent education
- Hope for more unified community experience
- Expedite the ability to make change district-wide
- Fewer school boards and members
- Lower cost as result? + improved buying power (materials + supplies)
- Clearer communication
- Increased personnel pool (sup./principals)
- Reduced # of boards for each superintendent
- Clearer direction for district
- Competition for board seats – board members more diverse
- Better use of resources – redistribution of students
- Less confusion regarding budgets
- Accountability
- Clear relationships/lines of access and communication
- Allows superintendent to be pro-active
- Delivery of services
- More attractive to recruitment of supers and principals
- Easy to understand governance structure
- Smaller governing body
- Better communication
- Less meetings

More people able to attend meetings if so choose
Less people involved in decision making
Things would get done quicker
Consolidation of classes
Reduction in the number of schools
Financial aspects if centralized budget, save money?
Flexibility re “filling” schools by different groupings, eg., K-3 in one school and 4-5 (6?) in another
Educational oversight allows better coordination
School choice
Possible tax savings
More efficiencies
Less duplication of effort
Fewer demands on super.
Fewer demands on board members
Easier to get system wide change
Fewer meetings
Su staffing/sharing of faculty and staff

Disadvantages

More remote – less personal
Less influence with school bd. due to bigger pond
Some schools may feel they lose autonomy for developing budget
Class sizes could become too large
Too much power for a small group
Quality of education would/could diminish
Lose contact with the “real world” – lose connection
Boards less responsive to community
Weighted voting power of board members - little schools lost
There would still be very small districts
Community will have limited representation (# of board members is small
Therefore not a clear representation of whole community)
Board elections will become more political
Loss of concern for the penny
Loss of individual communities
Weighted vote is a roadblock for acceptance in this community. “Possible Deal Breaker”
Potential less access to the central office
Potential loss of school and school identity
Lonely experience for the single board member
Loss of local control
Resistance due to “fear of change”
Loss of “perceived” local control
Weighting by population problematic for small towns
Resistance to change
Find way to insure small town needs are met
Smaller populated towns lose voting power
Loss of the feel of local control
Less people involved in decision making
Loss of jobs administrators, teachers, paras, custodial, bus drivers, etc.

Longer busing times if reorganization of schools follows
Local towns lose control of local school
Voters would look at system as a whole and not invest in the particulars of any one school
Possible loss of local school cultures
Lose autonomy
Board imposes decision on all communities and school
Educational equality
Weighted population of board is disadvantage to small school districts
Su board would hire local district administrator not being familiar with local needs
Equality of resources
Possible resentment for possible inequality for services/resources

Debrief Comments:

Can we have a board structure similar to MAU board?
Keep su as is – superintendent only goes to su board meetings and appoints others to go to individual board meetings
Where does pre-k fit into this?
School choice all grade levels
Consolidate now
Get out of town
Work on reducing taxes “COST”
Have we debated long enough YES
Example By Pass, Middle School, etc.
Use common sense approach
Financial savings in board salaries
Carousel meetings – group super. attendance, Policy, Common decisions
Have any other districts that fit our profile made the change to proposed model?
What is the real cost savings for each district?
What’s impact on NCLB, standards based report card, statewide calendar, statewide contract?
What support would the Commissioner give to this community to guarantee fairness in the way of voting process?
Any system is a tool – the users of the system still need to do the same decision-making tasks, implementations, etc.
Need more investigation of various ways to populate a school and balance enrollments – e.g., splitting K-2/4-6 groups
Need to make a connection between the implementation of the Commissioner’s white paper and the financial implications
Create bullet points from white paper for public digestion....simplify, simplify, simplify
Inventory current super dist successful? Challenges? Pros/cons? Would you do it again?
Transition – plan, educate, communicate
Contract negotiations
Education funding alternatives, sales tax, income tax
School-based site, councils that report to school board
State-wide teacher contracts....statewide school calendar
S/u, statewide transportation systems
Every school needs to be represented if there is a central board
Increase the minimum number of board members
How would this change make education more effective? Efficient?

Closing of small schools? Question to Cate
Overall timeframe of process? Question to Cate
Site-based management (for or against?) (1993 gov report) Question to Cate
What other mechanisms could there be?
Appropriate time on bus?
Implications on private/public schools? (eg/.Burr and Burton)
Private/ public student population?
Information dissemination process
Hope this is not all for naught
This was a wonderful process. Thanks for having it